UNITED NATIONS STAFF UNION

SCB/1118
8 January 1993

GENERAL ASSEMBLY DECISIONS AFFECTING UN STAFF MEMBERS

At its 47th session, the General Assembly has considered a series of issues of interest to staff members. They were dealt with by four different informal working groups of the Fifth Committee under four different headings:

1. Privileges and Immunities
2. Personnel Questions
3. Common System Issues Other Than Pensions
4. Pension Issues

On three of these items, deliberations culminated in the adoption of resolutions; the other item, personnel questions, is to be taken up again at a resumed session in 1993.

1. Privileges and Immunities

Under this item, the Assembly dealt also with questions relating to the security and safety of UN Staff. The resolution adopted under this item is probably the most meaningful ever. In particular, it "strongly deplores...cases where the...safety and well-being of officials have been placed in jeopardy", it "requests the Secretary-General to take all necessary measures to ensure the safety of UN personnel..." and "reminds host countries of their responsibility for the safety of ...all UN personnel on their territory."

2. Personnel Questions

Sharp differences over the criteria governing the equitable geographic distribution of Professional posts made it impossible to reach an agreement on an omnibus resolution. On matters of more immediate interest to staff, career development, staff-management relations and advancement of women, discussions were quite positive, and this is likely to be reflected in the final resolution, if agreement on the geographic issue can be reached. For the first time, the President of the UN Staff Committee was invited to an informal briefing session where he was given a chance to answer a number of highly relevant questions.

STAFF COMMITTEE BULLETIN

93-01280

READEX
MICHE

3. Common System Issues Other Than Pensions

The results of the 47th session provide a remarkable contrast: On the one hand, Member States finally seem to have realized that the drastic cuts in Professional pay and pensions made in the 1980's are creating difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified staff, at least from certain countries; on the other hand they are taking measures with regard to salaries and pensions of the General Service and related categories that will make the United Nations a less attractive local employer.

For all internationally recruited staff, the education grant level will be adjusted in line with the movement of education costs.

For Professionals, dependency allowances are increased in line with inflation. The base/floor salary is increased by 6.9%, as recommended by the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC). (An important reminder: This has no direct impact on salary levels in New York or other major duty stations, where only separation payments are affected.)

These decisions are not unexpected, what is surprising is that the GA accepted the principle of a new methodology for calculating the New York/Washington cost-of-living differential which it asked the ICSC to finalize and to apply, without waiting to see what the impact would be. Moreover, it requested the ICSC to look anew at the interpretation of the Noblemaire Principle, which governs Professional salaries. These decisions may not produce any salary increase in the short term, but they just about eliminate the possibility of any freeze in the foreseeable future and could well lead to increases after 1994. This was clearly understood by all concerned.

For staff in the General Service and related categories, the outlook is bleaker. The GA did not challenge the ICSC decisions on the salary survey methodology, and while the changes made will affect New York less than other duty stations, the resolution contains language that seems to be aimed directly at New York. It directs organizations not to "resume interim adjustment to salaries until..(ICSC) recommendations are acted upon", and again the Secretary-General is requested to report on what he intends to do as a result of the non-implementation of the 1989 survey results.

Two additional points deserve a mention: As of 1993, the ICSC will have four new members (out of 15). This could have a major impact, but only the future will show. Next year, with few exceptions, the GA will not consider Personnel or Common System questions, which will henceforth be considered only every other year.

4. Pension Issues

The one major issue arising under this item was the review of the methodology for determining pensionable remuneration (PR) for the General Service and related categories. Here again, it became apparent that attacks on conditions of service of these categories have not ceased. As neither the ICSC nor the Pension Board had completed their work, the GA was unable to take any final decision; however the resolution clearly instructs the ICSC and the Board to eliminate or at least reduce the differences between the GS and the Professional systems.

At this stage, nobody can predict what the final result will be, but on the basis of the resolution, we can already conclude that the GS PR will be reduced by at least 2%. The extent of further reduction will depend on the option retained and on whether the ICSC and the Assembly will accept an improvement in the Professional system, which would lessen the pressure to reduce the GS scale. It goes without saying that the Staff Union will do its utmost to achieve the best possible outcome.